

Families and survivors hold six-month commemoration of Grenfell Tower fire

Paul Mitchell
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Around 2,000 people—families of those who died in the June 14 Grenfell Tower fire, survivors, local residents and supporters—held their monthly “Silent March” on December 14 to mark six months since the tragedy occurred.

In the morning, a national memorial ceremony was held at St. Paul’s Cathedral in central London, attended by members of the Royal Family and political leaders including Prime Minister Theresa May and Labour’s Jeremy Corbyn. It was broadcast across the country by the BBC. At the start of the week, the government’s public inquiry headed by Judge Sir Martin Moore-Bick held its inaugural session lasting two days.

The marchers carried photographs of those who had perished in the fire, and flowers and candles that cast a green glow through the streets of North Kensington. They held large green heart-shaped banners and placards with slogans including “Justice for Grenfell” and “We demand the truth.”

Firefighters from the Red Watch at North Kensington fire station, the first to arrive at the scene, lined the street at Ladbrooke Grove in silence and were clearly emotional as the marchers walked past.

Socialist Equality Party members and supporters distributed leaflets entitled, “ Six months since the Grenfell Tower fire ” to the marchers and spoke to some before and after.

Local resident Mohammed said, “I’ve come to nearly every one of the marches since they started. They have got bigger and I think they are getting stronger. It shows people are determined that Grenfell won’t be forgotten. If they think we are going to give up they had better think again. Grenfell is a moment of change and we won’t let it go back to before.

“A lot of people distrust the inquiry. We got a petition going to get more diversity in the advisers to

the judge, Moore-Bick, but I don’t know if he will take any notice. I doubt it. He has been so arrogant in the past. In any case I don’t think it is so much about advisers. They will get the answer they want—which is to make sure the culprits get off.

“Bick will make some recommendations that don’t address the real issues like the way council housing has been destroyed, rents are sky high and people can’t afford to live in London anymore.”

Maura, a young medical student, said, “I read your leaflet and really agree with what is says; especially the bit about social murder.

“It’s been six months and most of the people from the tower are still without a home despite the government and council saying they would be rehoused in weeks.

“I didn’t realise the police have not actually questioned anyone yet, let alone charged anyone. And it looks like things won’t happen for years. It really is a plot to prevent the truth getting out and any justice happening. Anyone who thinks the inquiry will get to the truth or make those who caused the fire pay will be sorely disappointed.

“I read about those newspaper reports which said left-wingers had hijacked the Grenfell protests. It’s just such an obvious smear campaign. They are just trying to divide people. They are blaming it on extremists so they can control things and stop things getting out of hand. It’s important though that people don’t feel intimidated and continue saying things, especially left-wing things, because you can’t rely on the establishment at all.”

Following the march a fundraiser was held at the WestBank Gallery, a short walk from Grenfell tower. Stevan Racz described how he and his family had searched day and night for his uncle, Dennis Murphy,

who had lived on the 14th floor of Grenfell Tower. It took three days before they found out he had perished.

In memory of his uncle, Racz helped set up a Christmas-for-Grenfell crowd funding campaign to hold a Christmas party for hundreds of people in the local community. The Christmas-for-Grenfell crowd funding page is here: <https://www.gofundme.com/christmas-for-grenfell>
Piers Thompson from “Save Our Silchester—No to Demolition” spoke about the campaign to prevent the “regeneration” of the Silchester estate, neighbouring Lancaster West, which includes Grenfell. He revealed that the Silchester Residents Association was rejected as a “core participant” in the government inquiry chaired by Moore-Bick, who decides who will appear and what questions will be allowed:

“We saw the tower being clad, experienced the disregard and contempt the rotten borough has for ordinary working people. We have invaluable insight but we were refused. They’re not interested in what 500 households who live next door have to say.”

Thompson condemned the right-wing attack on local campaign groups that started with a *Times* article “How the far left tried—and failed—to hijack Grenfell” last Monday, followed by near identical articles in the *Daily Mail* and *Express*. He criticised the way they had misquoted local residents, including survivor Sid-Ali Atmani, to sow divisions in the community.

Thompson had spoken to Dominic Kennedy, author of the *Times* article, and “thinks he stopped” him from targeting Edward Daffarn from the Grenfell Action Group, but he was unable to stop Kennedy “smearing ordinary people ... our friends and neighbours.”

“This is not random, but deliberate targeting,” he said, “accusing them of hijacking Grenfell for political purposes. But it is the council in cahoots with developers, who want to knock down all our houses, scatter our community and close down our open spaces.”

Thompson described how, six months after the fire, his 14-year-old daughter has all the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after having seen her friends and neighbours burn to death.

The terrible aftereffects of the fire on young people in the area were further revealed by Michael Defoe, director of the Harrow Club, which seeks to “enhance the lives of the disadvantaged young people.” The

Harrow Club had opened its doors three hours after the fire started and had become a relief centre and then donation centre, “filling the void” left by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) council and its Tenant Management Organisation (TMO).

The club is providing counselling and residential retreats for “lots of young people who saw things they shouldn’t have and now find it difficult to process their experience and how to express it.” Many young people were showing signs of trauma and often misunderstood behavioural issues. Before the fire, RBKC had cut funding to the Harrow Club by 9 percent. When asked to reinstate it afterwards the council refused, forcing the club to find funding from charities.

Mo Bakhtiar and Tabassum Awan, on behalf of the Al Manaar Cultural Centre, explained how the mosque had opened its doors to the local community “for all religions and none” to use as their home. Bakhtiar condemned the government for not treating the Grenfell disaster as a “national disaster” and mobilising resources. The council has spent £20-30 million on one road “to make it look nice,” while closing down children’s centres and support for families.

Channel Four News anchor Jon Snow also addressed the fundraising evening, drawing on remarks he delivered at the Edinburgh TV Festival in August where he warned the elite of its “disconnect” from “the disadvantaged” and “the excluded” in society .

Fire Brigades Union General Secretary Matt Wrack explained how firefighters “had to break all the procedures and rules” and draw on “hundreds of years of experience” as they struggled to rescue the tower’s residents.



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